

“We can light a lamp for others here and there as we go along the path ourselves, and every conscientious Buddhist will do so, by making use of whatever opportunity comes his way of making the Dhamma known to others. It is then up to the others to take advantage of the light or not, as they wish. Truth cannot be associated with compulsion. It has to be accepted freely and followed freely. We cannot drill others into perfection - only ourselves.”

Francis Story
(Later Anagarika Sugathananda)

A Brief Outline of Buddhism

Presented By

Chandev Goonewardena

The Idler when he does not exert himself when he should, who though young and strong is full of sloth, with a mind full of vain thoughts-such an indolent man does not find the path to wisdom.

Dhammapada Verse 280

Buddhism is the English term given to the Buddha's Teaching; the word for it in the Pali language is Dhamma. Pali language is the language in which the Buddha delivered his sermons. It is also the language in which the Teaching was first recorded in writing, around 50 B.C., at Aluvihara in Matale, Sri Lanka.

This presentation is on the Theravada or Hinayana or the Elders school of Buddhism, which is the oldest unbroken Buddhist tradition in the world. All other schools of Buddhism prevailing today are categorized under Mahayana Buddhism, which developed a new canon around 2000 years ago containing 5% of the sermons of the historical Buddha. The Mahayana school developed from a group of monks who broke away from the orthodox monk i.e. the Sthavīravādins, as the former wanted 10 rules of the discipline promulgated by the Buddha for the ordained to be relaxed. The group that made this request were named Mahasanghikas. REFER PAGES 2A, 6A AND 7A. Scholars are of the opinion that there is no difference in the Vinaya and the Sutta Pitakas of the Theravādins and the original Sthavīravādins.

A great Buddhist scholar of German origin Anagārika Govinda describes Buddhism as follows:
As an experience and a practical way of realization, Buddhism is a **Religion**; as an intellectual formulation of this experience it is a **Philosophy**; as a result of systematic self-observation it is **Psychology**; as a norm of behaviour, resulting from an inner conviction or attitude based on the aforesaid properties, it is **Ethics**; and as a principle of outer conduct, it is **Morality**.

Siddhaththa Gautama was born around 623 B.C. to the King and Queen of the Sākya Republic in the North Eastern part of India. He was married to Yasōdhara, had a son Rāhula, and left the house-holder's life at the age of 29 seeking the solution to the trials and tribulations of sentient existence. After practicing to a completion various spiritual paths learned from leaders of different spiritual persuasions and not having discovered the solution, he set off on his own on the spiritual quest. This individual gained enlightenment at the age of 35 in Bodh Gaya, while he was in deep meditation (contemplation); from then on he was referred to as the Buddha. Prior to his attainment of Buddhahood he is referred to in the texts as a Bōdhisatva, i.e., one who is aspiring to be a Buddha. The Buddha says of himself that he is the **supreme physician** who diagnosed the ailment common to all sentient beings and also discovered its remedy.. The Buddha lived to 80 years of age. Therefore his ministry lasted for 45 years i.e. from the age of 35 years when he attained enlightenment to the age of 80 years, when he passed away.

The Buddha is the Discoverer of THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS OR REALITIES. After his, enlightenment, i.e., discovery of THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, due to his compassion and loving-kindness, he disseminated the knowledge of these truths to humans and higher beings. The whole of the Buddha's Teaching is centered around the concept of ALL EMBRACING KINDNESS also known as LOVING KINDNESS, the Pali word for this is METTĀ. The Buddha is complete in the highest standards of virtue and experiential wisdom (not mere conceptual wisdom). The Buddha's Teaching if practised by an individual, takes one from the world known to him through his senses, to the unknown; which is Nibbāna or the Nibbānic experience. The Buddha cautions those attempting to practice Buddhism when he says "holding wrong views of the Dhamma (Teaching) is like seizing a venomous snake by its tail" (Sutta Pitaka, Majjhimanikaya-Sutt 22 Sutta Alagaddupama).

The Buddha and his disciples, who had attained the fourth or final stage of Sainthood, delivered many sermons over the Buddha's 45 years of ministry. These sermons have been classified into two major sections, which are named the Vinaya Pitaka (the rules of monastic discipline for monks and nuns) and the Sutta Pitaka (teachings for the ordained, laypeople and higher beings).

The Vinaya Pitaka is totally the words of the Buddha, while the Sutta Pitaka contains mostly the sermons of the Buddha, and some sermons of his attained disciples. After about 200 years since the Buddha's passing away another Pitaka came into existence which was named the Abhidhamma Pitaka. This Pitaka is a philosophical treatment of the Teaching as presented in the Sutta Pitaka. The Buddha advises a person who intends to verify whether a statement could be attributed to him, to do so by checking with the Vinaya and corroborating with the Sutta. There is no mention of the Abhidhamma regards this matter. (Sutta Pitaka D.N.16, A.N IV.180)

Enlightenment; is meant in Buddhism to be the experiential understanding of THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, which is the central core of Buddhism. This experiential realization is the experiencing of the state of Nibbana, which according to Buddhism occurs when true wisdom has been achieved. The Nibbanic state is achieved while an individual is living. It also means the constant seeing things as they really are, from that point onwards, and never again seeing things with the clouded vision of an average unattained person. An average unattained person views the external world and himself through his concepts which are governed by his emotions, his culture and the values prevalent in his lifetime. Thus the opinions and judgments which are arrived at, by an average human being or commoner i.e., a person who has not experienced the 'Four Noble Truths' discovered by the Buddha, are invariably biased and partial. The commoner is most often subjective in his assessment of situations and not objective. The Buddha's Teaching provides the method to transcend these concepts and adopt a value system which is objective and universally just being based on reality. Thus this value system assists the individual to be unbiased and impartial when judging himself and the world at large.

The Buddha states that all conditioned phenomena including sentient beings are subject to change and therefore impermanence. Sentient beings undergo anxiety and suffering due to this impermanence. The Buddha through his attainment realized that a sentient being (*satva*) has no permanent or eternal self, ego-entity or soul. A sentient being according to Buddhism is a being:

- a) Having a re-becoming mind
- b) Is capable of thought or has potential for it in the future
- c) Has a persistence of memory
- d) Able to respond to and is conscious of sense impressions or the potential for it in the future

which has taken existence in any one of the five planes. The sentient being is made up of five components of existence, which are:

- 1) Corporeality (body with its six senses)- *Rūpa*
- 2) Feelings or Sensations-*Vedanā*
- 3) Perception or awareness of sensations-*Saññā*
- 4) Mental Formations or tendencies that make up the character –*Sankhāra*
- 5) Consciousness (sum of awareness)- *Viññāna*

Each of these is a process and the five processes make up a unit, which is termed a sentient being. This unit, in conventional speech, is termed to be an individual living being. It must be remembered that each of these individuals are only separate identifiable bundles of processes. It is of importance to keep in mind that these are processes which mean that they are in change or flux; none of them have a substratum.

Enlightenment is gained by totally eradicating the three root causes of all unwholesome activities, which are greed (lobha), anger (dosa) and delusion (moha). The Buddha states that these three are existent in the mind of a sentient being due to spiritual ignorance. The methodology to eradicate these is the Noble Eight Fold Path, which is THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH. Once the practice of the Noble Eight Fold Path is completed the individual realizes that all sentient existence is impermanent (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and without a permanent ever-lasting soul, self or ego-entity (*Anattma*). Therefore I could be said that on the eradication of greed, hate and delusion; the impermanence , suffering and egolessness of sentient existence is realized.

The central core of Buddhism is THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS OR THE FOUR SUPREME REALITIES. It is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but realistic.

Noble Truth of Suffering – 1st Noble Truth: Birth is suffering, decay (old age) is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to get what one desires is suffering¹. –**Ailment Diagnosed.**

Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering – 2nd Noble Truth: It is craving, which gives rise to fresh re-birth, and bound up with pleasure and lust, now here and now there, finds ever fresh delight². **Cause of the Ailment Discovered.**

Three types of craving:

- (a) Sensual craving (KĀMA TANHĀ)
- (b) Craving for (eternal) existence (BHAVA TANHĀ)
- (c) Craving for self-annihilation. (VIBHAVA TANHĀ)

¹ The Word of the Buddha – Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera

² The Word of the Buddha – Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera

Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering – 3rd Noble Truth: It is the complete fading away and extinction of the craving, its forsaking and abandonment, liberation and detachment from it³.

The knowledge the ailment can be cured, as its cause is known.

Noble Truth of the Path that Leads to the Extinction of Suffering – 4th Noble Truth: It is through the practice of THE MIDDLE PATH which does not cater to the attachment to indulgence in sensual pleasures nor self mortification, that extinction of suffering can be achieved. The MIDDLE PATH is also called THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH. **The remedy for the ailment.** *Please refer to the chart 1 page 8A for THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH.*

The theory and practice of Buddhism can be classified as follows:

I)

- a. Liberality (Dāna)
- b. Morality (Sīla)
- c. Meditation (Bhāvanā)

The Buddha delivered sermons following this pattern, when speaking to layman who were inclined in amassing merits to gain rebirth into pleasant circumstance.

II)

- a. Morality (Sīla)
- b. Awareness and meditation (Samādhi)
- c. Experiential wisdom (Paññā)

The Buddha delivered sermons following this pattern when speaking to individuals with some knowledge of spiritual values.

(III)

- a. Learning of the Doctrine (pariyatti)
- b. Practice of the Doctrine (patipatti)
- c. Penetration of the Doctrine (pativēda)

This classification of the Teaching was developed by the monks at the First Council after the Buddha passed away.

(IV)

- a. Knowledge of the Dhamma based on Teachings heard from another (Suta marga panna)
- b. Knowledge acquired through reflection on what has been learned (Cintamaya panna)
- c. Knowledge based on experience acquired through mental activity i.e. meditation (Bhavanamaya panna)

Sermons delivered following this pattern to individuals who already had some knowledge of spirituality.

In the practice of Buddhism there is no indulgence in prayer. Prayer is considered an address (as a petition) to God or a God in word or thought. The stanzas in Pali which a Buddhist recites are the verbalizing of the standards of behavior, in word, deed and thought, which he has voluntarily accepted, and he hopes to attain. This daily recitation is a constant reminder to

³ The Word of the Buddha – Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera

himself of what he needs to achieve. When a Buddhist pays homage before a Buddha statue, he is only recollecting the memory of, and paying respect to the individual, who achieved the highest standards of virtue and wisdom. Respecting the Buddha in this manner the Buddhist is wishing to emulate the Buddha. The Buddhist does not pray to the Buddha for assistance to overcome his trials and tribulations or to achieve some ambition, imagining the Buddha to be somewhere in the universe watching over all beings.

- 1) Buddhist laymen and laywomen attempt to adhere to five precepts or voluntarily undertaken vows in their daily lives.
- 2) Ordained males or monks (Bhikkhus) attempt to adhere to 227 rules.
- 3) Ordained females or nuns (Bhikkhunis) attempt to adhere to 235 rules.

Both orders of ordained individuals i.e. monks and nuns, were established by the Buddha during his lifetime. The individuals of both orders have to live in celibacy. All monastic rules were promulgated by the Buddha himself, and have been preserved unchanged since then.

A Lay Buddhists Five Precepts or Vows

- 1) I will abstain from intentionally killing or harming physically or psychologically all sentient beings.
- 2) I will abstain from taking with criminal intentions what does not belong to me.
- 3) I will abstain from committing adultery and indulging with greed in sensual gratification.
- 4) I will abstain from speaking falsehood, vindictive or harsh language, gossiping and tale-bearing.
- 5) I will abstain from consuming all forms of intoxicants

The first four precepts are identical to the 3rd and 4th path factors of THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH. The 5th precept is discussed in certain sermons by the Buddha. Those who practice the five precepts give the other sentient beings a great gift, which is that none of the latter, need fear any aggression from them (Abhaya – Dana). The Buddha states that his Teaching becomes deeper gradually like the ocean. Spiritual development initially begins with Buddhist morality as shown in the CHART on 8A

Faith (Saddha) is the confidence established in the Buddha, his Teaching and his saints, i.e., attained disciples; after a reasoned investigation, accompanied by reflections on the doctrines embodied in the Teaching. The investigation needs to be objective, therefore impartial and unbiased.

Faith (Saddha) is the faculty (*indriya*) which motivates one to embark on the practise. This develops into a power (*bala*) when the practice has progressed to the 1st level of sainthood. Kamma (Pali), Karma (Sanskrit) – is the intentional performance of activities verbally, physically or mentally..

Vipaka – is the result or fruit that comes about due to action performed with intention. The Buddha teaches that until an individual achieves the Nibbanic experience, the individual's accumulated Kamma, i.e., action performed with intention, will cause recurring births at different levels or the same level of existence.

Five levels or planes of existence according to the Buddha

- 1) Lower world
- 2) Animal world
- 3) Spirit sphere
- 4) Human Beings
- 5) Higher Beings

Universe – forms and deforms in cycles over periods of time. A beginning to these cycles does not exist.

Earth is part of a world system and this in turn is part of a larger world system and many of these make a larger world system and there are innumerable such world systems in the universe.

Rebirth – according to Buddhism, after the death of a sentient being it acquires another life form in an environment with a suitable physical form, condition of health etc. dependent on its past kamma. There is no soul transmigrating from the previous life form to the next.

In Hinduism there is the idea that a soul transmigrates from one life to the next. Buddhism does not cater to this idea and Buddhists term it reincarnation. English dictionaries indicate reincarnation and rebirth to be synonyms because the English vocabulary lacks words to differentiate between these two concepts.

Comments on the Buddha by some Renowned People

In *The Three Greatest Men in History*, H.G. Wells writes-

“In the Buddha you see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely battling for light- a vivid human personality, not a myth. He too gave a message to mankind universal in character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All miseries and discontents are due, he taught, to selfishness. Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a great being. Buddha in different language called men to self-forgetfulness 500 years before Christ. In some ways he is nearer to us and our needs. He was more lucid upon our individual importance and service than Christ and less ambiguous upon the question of personal immortality.”

St. Hillaire remarks,

“The perfect model of all the virtues he preaches. . . his life has not a stain upon it.”

Dr. Sr. Radhakrishnan (scholar and former President of India) states:

“ . . he belongs to the history of the world’s thought, to the general inheritance of all cultivated men, for judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness, and spiritual insight, he is undoubtedly one of the greater figures in history.”

Robert Oppenheimer writes:

“If we ask, whether the position of the electron remains the same we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron’s position changes with time, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron is at rest we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether it is in action, we must say ‘no’.

The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the condition of man’s self after death, but they are not familiar answers from the tradition of the 17th and 18th century science.”

Who is the Samma Sambuddha?

- 1) Fully Enlightened (awakened)
- 2) Complete in virtue and wisdom
- 3) The Teacher of Higher Beings and Humans
- 4) Knower of the Worlds
- 5) A guide incomparable for the training of individuals
- 6) The Teacher of the nature of existence - suffering and the method to its cessation

Sutta Pitaka, Anguttara Nikaya,

- 7) He possesses the following 10 special attributes
 - i) Understands thoughts as they actually are- Possible as Possible, the Impossible as Impossible.
 - ii) Understands the ripening of Kamma (actions performed with intention) of the past present and future with possibilities and causes.
 - iii) The knowledge of which paths lead to existence in the five planes of existence and also the path to Nibbāna.
 - iv) Understands the universe with its many different elements
 - v) Understands how beings have different inclinations.
 - vi) Understands the disposition of the faculties of other beings, other persons.
 - vii) Understands the defilement of, the cleansing of and emergence from the jhanas (absorptions), liberations, concentrations and attainments.
 - viii) Recollects his past lives in detail.
 - ix) Sees the passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, understands how beings pass on according to their kammās.
 - x) By realization himself with direct knowledge, has arrived at the final exhaustion of taints.

Sutta Pitaka, Majjima Nikaya, Mahasihanada Sutta. Sutta 12.

Dhamma- Teaching of the Buddha

**THE BUDDHA HAS STATED THAT THE WHOLE OF HIS TEACHING IS BASED ON LOVING –
KINDNESS (METTĀ)**

The Teaching is compared to the Ocean from the following aspects:

- 1) The Teaching becomes deeper gradually like the ocean.
- 2) The Teaching is stable like the ocean and does not overflow its boundaries
- 3) The Teaching casts aside unsuitable individuals like the ocean does not tolerate a dead body.
- 4) Individuals of lofty or low status lose their identity when they enter the order of monks, like the rivers which flow into the ocean loses their identity.
- 5) The entering of many individual to the Nibbāna Element, is not burdensome, like the streams and rivers and rain fall does not appear to increase or decrease the water in the ocean.
- 6) The Teaching has only one taste- the taste of liberation from suffering, like the water from the ocean tasted from any location has only one taste- the taste of salt.
- 7) The Teaching has many valuable aspects, like the oceans has many treasures. E.g. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness , right efforts, etc.
- 8) The Teaching has many great individuals in its fold, like the ocean has creatures which are small, medium and large in size.

Sutta Pitaka, Angattara Nikaya, Book of Eights Sutta 47.

**Eight Worldly Conditions
Vicissitudes of life
(Attalokadhamma)**

Gain (Labha)

Loss(Alabha)

Fame(Yasa)

Defame(Ayasa)

Praise(Pasamsa)

Blame(Ninda)

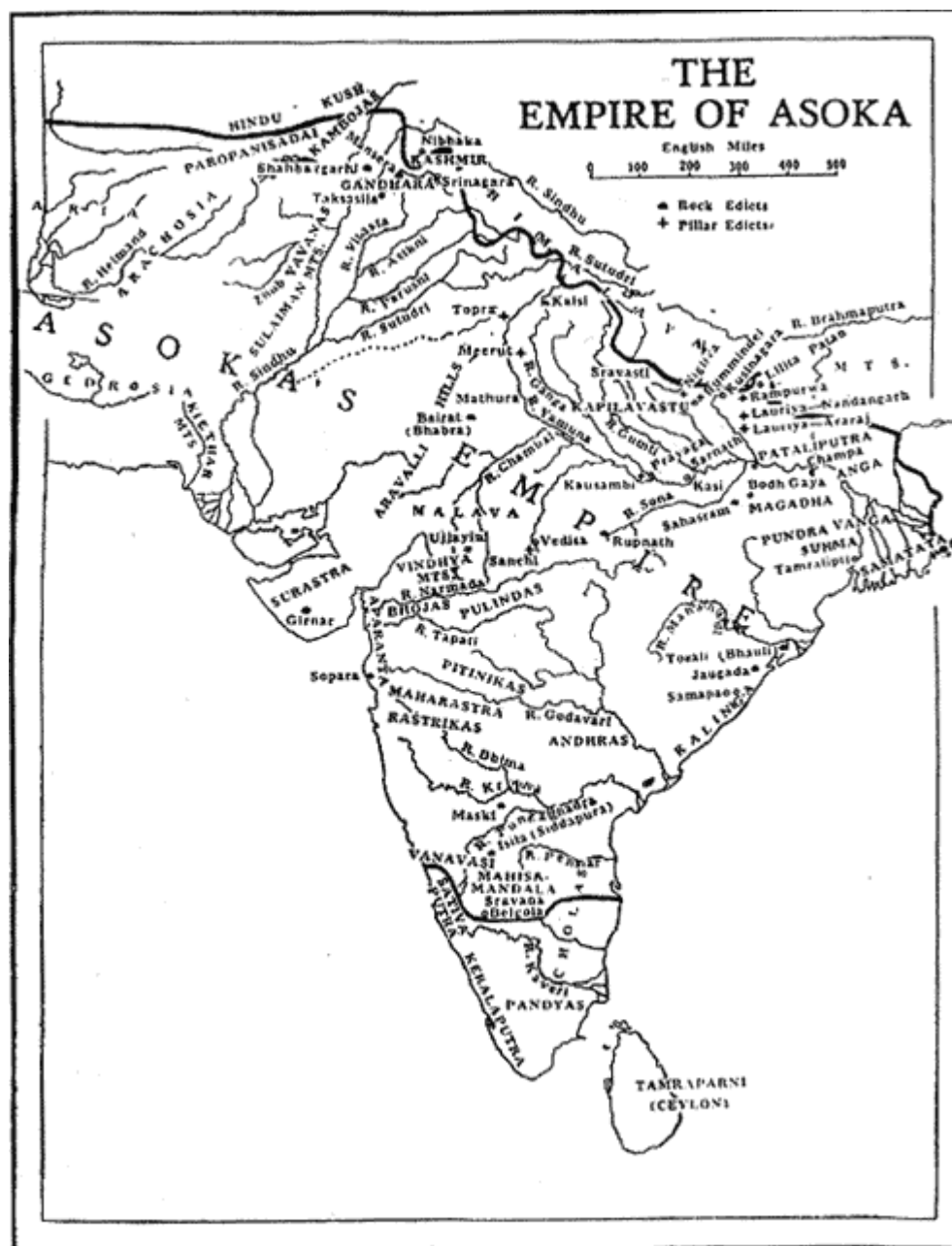
Happiness(Sukha)

Pain(Dukkha)

Sutta Pitaka,Anguttara Nikaya
Book of Eights, Sutta No:5

One has to be prepared for the situations mentioned above prior to their occurrence. In the event there has been no preparation, the individual will be unable to maintain his sense of equanimity and succumb to exhilaration or depression: both lead to a sense of mental imbalance. Too much laughter leads one to tears, great sorrow too leads one to tears. Attachment to so called sources of joy, has also the potential to cause depression.

2500 years of Buddhism – First Published in 1956 by the Publication Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting : Government of India.

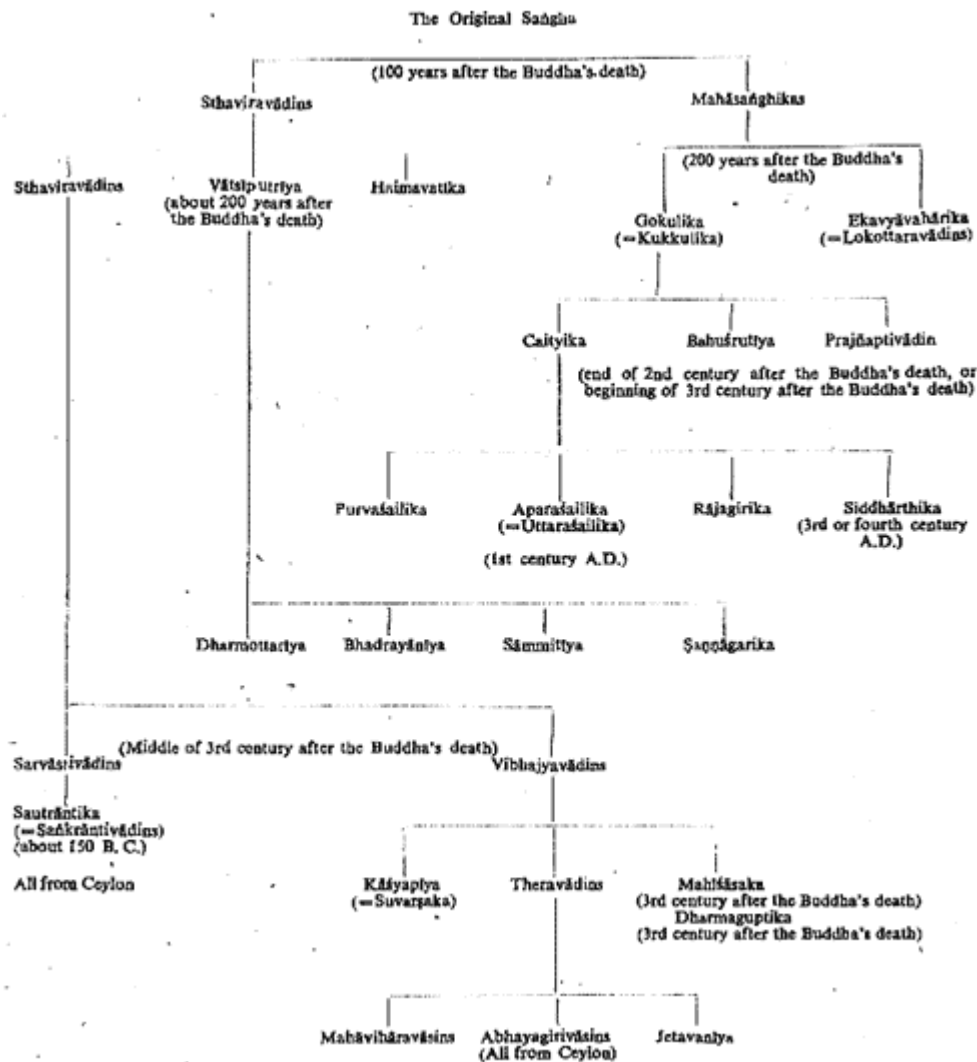


Kapilavastu – Capital of the Sakyan Republic

Siddhaththa Gautama who later became the Buddha at the age of 35, was born in a park named Lumbini, not far from this city.

Bodha Gaya – The location where Siddhaththa gained enlightenment and became the Buddha.

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silver. In modern times, however, these rules are not always applied with equal rigour. His only possessions are a begging bowl, water filter, tooth-stick, razor, needle, stick and fan, all returned to the Community after his death. He lives on begged food, mostly balls of rice, which must be consumed by midday. As a novice he has a spiritual master. He rises early and leads a carefully disciplined day, with time for meditation and spiritual instruction.

COUNCILS AND SECTS

A few weeks after the passing of the Blessed One, 500 adepts, or *arhats*, met at Rajagaha in the First Buddhist Council to determine the content of the *Dhamma*, which was thereafter handed down in three *Pitakas*, or 'Baskets': the Rules of the Disci-

pline of the Order (*Vinaya-pitaka*), the Discourses (*Sutta-pitaka*), and the metaphysics, psychology and philosophy (*Abhi-dhamma*).

Within about a century a Second Council had to be held, at which a progressive party argued that the Rules were too rigid and should be relaxed. Buddhahood was internal and should be allowed to grow naturally. The Orthodox held that Buddhahood came from observing the Rules. They won – and the progressives seceded. This was the beginning of the sects within Buddhism. (Subsequent Councils have been infrequent, and always designed for the purifying of the records; the sixth was held in Rangoon in 1956.)

The greatest division took place in the later centuries BCE, between the Theravada – part of the 'Little Vehicle' (bearing humankind across the ocean of suffering to salvation) – with its orthodox concern for the Teaching of the Elders, and the Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle', with its greater accommodation to local practices and beliefs.

THERAVADA BUDDHISM

HISTORICAL OUTLINE AND PRESENT-DAY DISTRIBUTION

Theravada, the Teaching of the Elders, is an orthodox form of Buddhism claiming to conform to the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings by the senior monks of the Sangha, the monastic Order founded by the Buddha. Today it is prevalent in Burma, Kampuchea, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand. With the exception of Vietnam, Buddhist countries of South-East Asia practise mostly Theravada Buddhism.

Theravada constitutes one of the schools (and for the time being, the only extant school) of Hinayana Buddhism, as distinct from the Mahayana Buddhism of China, Japan, Mongolia and Tibet.

In the fourth century BCE, the Buddhist monastic order split into two sects called the Sthavira and the Mahasanghika respectively. The Sthavira claimed a stricter adherence to the original teaching and monastic discipline; from it there developed several schools, one of which is the Theravada, its origins in fact going back to the Third Buddhist Council, held during the reign of the Emperor Ashoka (d. 232 BCE) in India.

Among the earliest Theravada communities were those that flourished in southern India and in Sri Lanka, where it was introduced by missionaries sent by Asoka in the third century BCE, and where it has been the dominant religion ever

since. In Burma the Theravada, or an allied form of Buddhism, was practised as early as the fifth century of the Common Era, and in Thailand from the sixth century. But the actual and active predominance of the Theravada in these countries dates from later times – the eleventh century in Burma and the fourteenth century in Thailand. And at about the same time as the influence of Sri Lankan Theravada was firmly establishing itself in Thailand, Thai influence in turn was simultaneously converting the inhabitants of Kampuchea and Laos to Theravada.

It is often claimed on behalf of Buddhists in Burma, Sri Lanka or Thailand that their specific form of the belief has preserved – and continues to preserve – the pure form of Theravada Buddhism. Certainly it is true that these countries have maintained a devotion to the study of the Theravada canon and have retained a religious practice of which the origins stem from the Elders' teachings found in the ancient commentaries of the canon. But each religious practice also contains many syncretistic features or adaptations of local observances. Nowhere did Theravada supplant completely the observances of other cults. Thus astrological concepts, the ritual propitiation of various deities and so forth, are widely prevalent in the Theravada countries, mostly in connection with matters of health, personal well being and material success. Underlying these observances are concepts and ideologies that have little to do with the original teachings of Buddh-

THERAVADA BUDDHISM

This map shows the distribution of Buddhism in India and south-east Asia c 1300 ce.



ism, most of them embodying a continuance of the ancient culture of these lands. By incorporating some elements of such cultures, Theravada practice has in each country developed features that are unique to itself, and in this sense it is legitimate to speak of Burmese, Thai or Sinhala (i.e. Sri Lankan) Buddhism.

BELIEF

Philosophically Theravada subscribes to a qualified realism. Phenomena exist 'objectively', but there are worlds and beings beyond the normal experience. In the Abhi-dhamma the Theravada teaches the doctrine that all mind and matter is reducible to eighty-one distinct elements; what is real are those elements and not their configurations as objects and beings. Things are also radically 'impermanent' – but death is not the end of living beings – yet there is the Ultimate Reality of *nibbana* which is not amenable to description and totally different from phenomena both objective and subjective.

An important teaching of Theravada, as indeed of all Buddhist schools, is that of the 'three characteristics' which mark phenomenal existence. These 'characteristics' are impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and 'absence of self' (*anatta*).

According to the teaching of *anatta* or 'no-self', the common assumption of an enduring personal core is a mistaken belief resulting from ignorance. All the factors that constitute the so-called individual can be summed up as five aggregates (*khandha*), namely physical form (*rupa*) sensa-

tions (*vedana*) perceptions (*sanna*), 'mental formations' or volitional activities (*sankhara*) and consciousness (*vinna*). All of these are subject to constant change and modification (*anicca*), which is their first characteristic. Not one of them, either singly or in any combination, perdures through time as an unchanging self or ego (*atta*).

Theravada does however admit within its teachings the fact of the continuance of individual consciousness. This 'consciousness of self' has its origin in ignorance and its continuance is by way of a causal process. This is the process of 'dependent origination' or, literally, 'conditioned co-arising' (*paticca samuppada*). The doctrine is presented in this traditional formulation:

- Conditioned by ignorance, there arise mental formations
- Conditioned by mental formations, there arises consciousness
- Conditioned by consciousness, there arises name-and-form
- Conditioned by name-and-form, there arise the six bases (senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thinking)
- Conditioned by the six bases, there arises contact
- Conditioned by contact, there arises sensation
- Conditioned by sensation, there arises craving
- Conditioned by craving, there arises attachment
- Conditioned by attachment, there arises 'becoming' (strong sense of continuing self)
- Conditioned by 'becoming' there arises birth
- Conditioned by birth there arises decay (old age), death, pain and sorrow, lament and despair

for the purpose of explaining rebirth and continuance of the ego-consciousness without assuming an enduring self.

Psychologically Theravada propounds a theory of mind and 'mental states' that recognizes the existence of residual (unconscious) forces stemming from prior experiences and constituting a block or fetter that holds the individual in a field of operations that are libidinal, greedy, malevolent, violent, and inwardly ignorant (*raga, dosa, moha*).

Within the totality of Buddhist teachings, called the *Dhamma*, Theravada thought also deals with the other major Buddhist themes, including *samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths; the four Noble Truths; the eightfold path; the liberation of mind from its bonds – which is co-equal with the realization of *nibbana* – and so on. Specifically, it propounds the notion of a graduated religious enterprise to which the ultimate end is this liberation. A central place is occupied by the three concepts of the middle path (the avoidance of extremes), 'dependent origination', and *karma* (that deeds wilfully done condition the consciousness and bring their own repercussions).

WRITINGS

These and other doctrines are found expressed in the Canon of the Three Baskets (*Tipitaka*), the compilation of the first two of which is traditionally ascribed to the First Buddhist Council held at Rajagaha in 483 BCE, soon after the death of the Buddha. The Canon is thought to have been agreed in a final form at the Third Council held in the time of the Emperor Ashoka.

The First group of scriptures, or 'baskets', includes the *Vinaya* ('discipline'). Its main concern is the corpus of monastic rules for *bhikkhus*.

The second basket of texts is the *Sutta Pitaka* ('collection of discourses'). The *Sutta Pitaka* is made up of five *nikaya* (collections). The first four *nikaya* are regarded as the chief source for knowledge of the teaching of the Buddha, or the *Dhamma*. They are: *Digha Nikāya* (the long collection); *Majjhima Nikāya* (the middle collection); *Samyutta Nikāya* (the grouped collection); *Anguttara Nikāya* ('an additional limb' collection).

The fifth *nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka* is a collection of fifteen works of varying length. These include some of the most important texts of the school such as the *Dhammapada*, *Sutta Nipata*, *Thera- and Theri- gatha* as well as the *Jataka*. The last-named work is a collection of verses which formed the basis of the later *Jataka Commentary* which purports to narrate the past lives of the Buddha. Many of these *Jataka* stories are undoubtedly folk stories pressed into Buddhist use. Their importance lies in the fact that they deal

with major Buddhist themes in a way that is eminently adapted for conveying the Buddhist teachings to the common people.

The third basket, the *Abhidhamma* ('the further *dhamma*', meaning perhaps '*dhamma* of higher level' as distinct from *dhamma* taught to every person, i.e., the *Sutta Pitaka*) is assigned by modern scholarship to a later date. It is based on scholastic elaborations of lists called *matikas* which are summaries of the teachings found at different places in the *Sutta Pitaka*. The characteristic concern of the *Abhidhamma* is to explain all phenomena in terms of certain irreducible impersonal elements or *dhammas* (see 'Belief').

All the major works of the school, including its version of the Three Baskets, are in Pali, the religious language of the Theravada, which is a literary language based on an as yet unknown vernacular of India at (or shortly after) the time of the Buddha, having a simpler structure than the Sanskrit of the Hindu texts.

WORSHIP

Buddha, *Dhamma* and Sangha constitute for Theravada (as for other schools) the 'threefold Refuge' – and the least that is expected by tradition of a Theravada Buddhist is the acceptance of this refuge and the observance of the five precepts: not to kill, not to steal, not to indulge in sexual misconduct, not to lie, not to take intoxicants.

Active religious observance is more complex, and is grounded in the theory of *kusala kamma* ('wholesome deeds'). Any act that strengthens greed, ill-will and ignorance is unwholesome. On the other hand, any act that tends to dissolve or counteract these unwholesome roots is a religiously good deed. The teaching is that the individual must 'internalize' the wholesome act by genuinely wanting to do it: formal performance is not sufficient. Such works of religious merit (*kusala* or *punna*) constitute the beginning or first part of the religious enterprise. Its higher purposes are achieved by dedication to the second part, of which the aim is to deepen the understanding of the truths of the teaching and, through self-knowledge and meditation, to realize the nature and workings of the mind and thereby transcend its limitations, and to awaken to a selfless awareness of the truth. Underlying this view is the notion of the final emergence of a radically different dimension of awareness, an insight 'empty' of the normal contents of consciousness.

It is in terms of this theoretical scheme that teachers of Theravada recommend to followers an extensive 'worship' and a routine round of 'good works' which generally involves and accommodates a number of social, ethical and re-

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

ORIGINS AND DISTRIBUTION

Mahayana Buddhism is one of the most influential movements in history. Arising in India at about the time of Christ, it expanded in a series of ripples which had consequences that were far removed from its place and time of origin. First it added a new dimension to Buddhism itself. Second, it had profound effects on the Indian religious tradition generally. Third, it travelled to Tibet (and hence to Mongolia) and China (and from there to Korea, Vietnam and Japan) and fundamentally transformed the world-views of those countries. Our task is to explain how all this could have happened.

The word 'Mahayana' means 'great vehicle' or 'way'. It is a term that the Mahayanists themselves invented and they contrasted it with the Hinayana or small vehicle/way of the traditional Buddhism that had preceded them. They gave two reasons why the Mahayana is great: it carries over more beings; and its aspiration is higher than that of traditional Buddhism: nothing less than to become Buddha. It did not take long for the Mahayana to combine these two and thereby formulate one of its more startling tenets: eventually, all beings will become Buddhas.

Traditional Buddhism had never said this. It taught that certain disciples of the Buddha could become enlightened, but not that they would have the full majesty and grandeur of the Buddha himself. The Mahayana teaching that not only can a disciple become a Buddha, but that all living creatures, whether human or animal (including amoebas and bacteria), can become Buddhas, is exceedingly radical. In fact, it adds a new dimension to Buddhism altogether.

How did this new departure come about? To answer this question, it is necessary to give an account of the origin of the Mahayana. There are three factors that have to be borne in mind in giving this account. First, the Mahayana relies exclusively on its own *sutras*. A *sutra* is a record of the words of the Buddha. These words are regarded as precious, holy and unique and it is unthinkable that any Buddhist, however pious, would invent a *sutra*. Yet the Mahayana does claim that the works which contain its teaching are the words of the Buddha, even though it is quite clear that they are different from the *sutras* of traditional Buddhism which are accepted by all Buddhists as the actual utterances of the historical Buddha. There are problems concerning the transmission of the traditional Buddhist *sutras* and it is not at all

necessary to accept that they are the unalloyed words of the historical Buddha. But the essential point is this: traditional *sutras* could be the words of the historical Buddha, but Mahayana *sutras* could not. Yet the Mahayana insists that they are the Buddha's teaching. This is an enormous and far-reaching claim. How could it be justified?

The answer is to be found in the Mahayana *sutras* themselves and it is essentially quite simple: the Buddha has appeared in a non-physical form and has personally founded the Mahayana himself. There are many passages that indicate that this is how the Mahayana began. The Buddha said to manifest his brightly shining body to those who are engaged in spiritual practice (*Lotus Sutra*, ch. 10, v. 28); elsewhere, the Buddha's body is described as golden, shining like the sun, and filling the beholder with delight. The sight of the Buddha (*buddha-darshana*) removes suffering and craving, and is purifying.

This visionary encounter with the Buddha is the second factor in our account of the origins of the Mahayana. And it has another facet to it: the Buddha not only appears, he also speaks. This speaking, of course, is the Mahayana justification for its insistence on its own *sutras* — they are only recording the actual words of the *real* Buddha (i.e. the Buddha who has appeared to them.) The Buddha's voice (*buddha-shabda*) is described in the new *sutras* as sweet, deep and resounding; those who hear it are related and overjoyed, yet calm and detached. And, of course, the words that the Buddha speaks are, by definition, true.

It is not difficult to realise the devastating impact that encountering the Buddha in this way must have had, and it helps us to understand the relation that the Mahayana has with the Buddhism that preceded it, the Hinayana (see p. 227) though this term is somewhat disparaging and scholars try not to use it. Entering the Mahayana was a powerful and transformative experience. Although the majority of those who did so were probably Buddhists (whether members of the *sangha* or lay followers), there was no special reason why they had to be. Essentially, the Mahayana stood on its own feet, since it had an independent source of truth via its own *sutras* (themselves received directly from the Buddha). It therefore tended to have a very casual attitude to the traditional Buddhist *sutras*. Undoubtedly, many Mahayanists were well acquainted with them and we do find the occasional passage in Mahayana *sutras* that can be identified from an earlier tradition. But although most Mahayanists are clearly

✧ *Sutra is the correct word for sacred utterance in the Buddhist sense.*

